

## Easter Sunday: SOMETHING MUST HAVE HAPPENED\*

This is a good size congregation this morning. I lay before you a paradox. Churches all over the world are most filled on Easter Sunday, as well they might be; yet it is precisely our Lord's resurrection from the dead that many people, including church people, find it most difficult to really believe actually happened. With a sort of naïve arrogance, a part of us simply assumes that anything we cannot understand must not be real. We believe that until we stand face to face with something we cannot comprehend (= wrap our minds around) but cannot deny.

I once stood on the north rim of the Grand Canyon next to a man who, like me, was seeing the wonder for the first time. Long we stood there in silence gazing upon the grandeur of this canyon — ten miles wide in places, a mile deep in places, over two hundred miles long. Finally he solemnly said, "Something must have happened here." He knew that hole had not been dug by a guy with a shovel. Such a result required an adequate cause.

The fact that Jesus of Nazareth is remembered at all today demands explanation. He was of obscure birth and parentage. He was reared in a remote corner of the Roman Empire which even Israelites considered provincial. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (Jn. 2:46). When grown, this carpenter's son became an itinerant preacher. Within three years he had so alienated the authorities of his religion that they convicted him of blasphemy, a capital crime. He had so alienated the Roman government that it sentenced him to death. On the day of his death, he was deserted by his friends, scourged by soldiers, mocked by a crowd, crucified between two thieves and his body laid in a borrowed tomb. He never wrote a book; he never held an office. He never commanded an army; he never founded a business. He never went to college. He never travelled two hundred miles from the place of his birth.

Twenty centuries have come and gone. Mighty armies have marched; mighty rulers have ruled. Empires have risen and fallen. Yet no one has affected human life on earth so much as he. Why? Something must have happened!

Given the pusillanimous performance of the apostles on Good Friday, the very existence of the Church cries out for explanation. The same Peter who, in the high priest's courtyard, thrice denied that he even knew Christ, was, a few weeks later, boldly proclaiming him in the temple precincts. Arrested, hauled before the same high priest who had condemned Christ, and told to keep his mouth shut, Peter replied "Whether it is right in the sight of God to obey men rather than God you must judge. We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:1-3, 18-20).

He must have seen something! He had seen something incomprehensible but undeniable, life changing and world altering. He had seen his Lord, who had been as dead as a run over dog, standing before him saying, "Feed my sheep" (Jn. 21:17). Within thirty years he had taken the report of what he had seen to the city of Rome itself where he wound up on a cross of his own. The Romans, merciless masters of the Mediterranean, threw men and women to lions to stifle the glorious gossip about Christ. For three hundred years they tried. But the rumors persisted: "He lives! He lives!" The Romans who killed Peter would be amazed to know that on the spot of his death now stands a basilica named after him, center of the Roman Catholic Church with over a billion members worldwide.

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\* Listen to the Audio recording of the sermon at [www.TheWorksofSamTodd.com](http://www.TheWorksofSamTodd.com) or to the entire Easter Service at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=zm2YQ0nAu8I](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zm2YQ0nAu8I) where Sam's sermon begins at timestamp 33:40.

The Romans who killed Christ would be dumbfounded if they knew that there are four times more Christians on earth today (two billion) than there were people on earth in Jesus' day. Something happened all right. Pontius Pilate had squinted at Christ and asked, "Are you some kind of a king?" Something like that - king of kings and lord of lords, forever and ever. The mind that conceived thermonuclear fusion as a device for powering the stars, giving light and life to worlds, had stood not ten feet from him. And Governor Pilate, after thinking the matter over, decreed, "Crucify him."

Oops. Well I guess you can't call them all right (as subsequent governors have also discovered). No one watching Pilate condemn Christ could have imagined that two thousand years later Pilate would be remembered only because he did, whereas buildings dedicated to the adoration of Christ would adorn almost every continent on this planet - every continent save Antarctica. We celebrate today the cause of that effect. Like all human institutions, the Church has become stagnant and corrupt at times. She has from time to time been ruled by men who were stupid, venal, incompetent or worse. But every time she ought to collapse and die, she is instead reformed, renewed, revitalized. By whom? The Christian Church has seen the commencement of all the governments and all the dynasties that presently exist on the face of the earth. I have no doubt she will live to see their end.

When we consider the fact that the Christian Church was already ancient before Columbus made land fall upon this continent and was centuries old already before the Saxon had set foot in Britain or the Frank had crossed the Rhine, and when we consider the fact that she exists today, not as a relic, much less a ruin, but as a growing, vibrant reality, I think we must conclude that she lives because he does. Alleluia!

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Acts 10:34-43 Psalm 118:14-17, 22-23 I Corinthians 15:19-26 John 20:1-18